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SUBJECT: ANNUAL OSAC CRIME & SAFETY REPORT - AFGHANISTAN

REF: A) 08 STATE 133533
B) 08 STATE 132056

¶1. Post, in accordance with REF B, submits its annual Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) crime and safety report for 2008. Responses are keyed to REF B.

¶2. 2008 OSAC Crime & Safety Report:

¶I. OVERALL CRIME/SAFETY SITUATION -

Criminal and terrorist activity in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, remains high and critical, respectively, as rated by the most recent SETL (REF A). The overall crime and safety situation is both volatile and unstable throughout much of Afghanistan. A lack of basic infrastructure, government services and emergency health facilities makes it an exceptionally hazardous country in which to reside or visit.

It is often difficult to differentiate between politically motivated criminal behavior, terrorism and/or traditional illegal activity. While narcotics trafficking accounts for a large portion of Afghanistan's crime problems, the country is challenged by a myriad of criminal and terrorists threats, many of which target foreigners.

These threats are no longer solely aimed at Coalition Forces (CF). All westerners and Afghans associated with westerners are targets, to include NGOs, local medical staff, aid and rehabilitation workers and many others. Visitors and residents of Afghanistan must be on guard against assault, kidnapping and all forms of theft, from simple pick pocketing to extortion.

Americans are strongly urged to refrain from any travel to Afghanistan as their safety and security cannot be guaranteed. Travelers should be advised that the U.S. Embassy's ability to provide emergency consular services to citizens in Afghanistan is limited, especially for those residing outside of the capital. Americans who come to Afghanistan should register with the Consular Section at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, preferably online at travel.state.gov, or in person. The Consular Section can be reached at:

U.S. Embassy Consular Section
Great Massoud Road Kabul, Afghanistan
USConsulKabul@state.gov
Emergency Telephone: 0700-201-908

Local Law Enforcement

Police and emergency services in Afghanistan vary from marginally competent, in the areas where regular and direct foreign assistance is ongoing, to ineffective or downright corrupt. Many Afghan citizens in need of assistance from local law enforcement do not trust the ability of the Afghan National Police (ANP) to assist them unless they have the money to bribe the official for assistance. Foreigners visiting Afghanistan are urged to ensure they maintain current contact information with their respective embassy for use in emergency situations. Foreigners should also carry a copy of their passport with them at all times.

In recent months, Afghan government officials have been confiscating equipment from western private security companies (PSC). The equipment that has been confiscated has included armored vehicles, body armor, weapons, radios, GPS systems and personal items. All persons conducting business in Afghanistan under the protection of a PSC, to include the PSC, are warned that they may be stopped and

have their protective and personal items confiscated, potentially putting the protectee at greater risk.

II. POLITICAL VIOLENCE -

Afghanistan remains a critical threat post for political violence. Such violence ranges from spontaneous mob attacks to calculated kidnappings and executions. The principle method of attack during recent months has been Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), with the second most common form of attack being small arms fire.

Anti-government elements frequently attack foreigners. While attacks in recent years had largely been confined to the south and along the Pakistani border, 2008 saw an increase in areas not traditionally targeted by insurgent groups, to include the west and the vicinity of Kabul. Nationwide, the number of IED's in 2008 (approximately 2000) was roughly double the number from 2007, while kidnappings (many of businessmen for ransom) also doubled to roughly 300 in 2008. Rocket attacks (aka indirect fire or "IDF") also impacted near the U.S. Embassy in mid-August 2008 and again in September 2008, while in late November 2008 a suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED) detonated within roughly 200 meters of the U.S. Embassy.

Historical Perspective

Violence has traditionally been used as an instrument of politics in Afghanistan. Assassinations, the targeting of civilians and general insurgent attacks grab headlines more than advances in Afghan security forces or the proactive introduction of western methods of political and economic strategy.

Traditionally, Afghanistan has had weak central government, and the current government under President Hamid Karzai has limited reach in some regions outside Kabul. Violence continues to occur largely in about 10 percent of the 363 districts, with the tactics of the anti-government elements shifting from insurgency to terrorism. Ordinary Afghans feel less safe as a result of this switch and as a result of rising criminality, especially kidnappings. Some turn to tribes, the local strong man or anti-government elements for security and stability in the absence of the government.

Transnational Terrorism

A history of disorder, warfare, tribalism, and a weak central government has made Afghanistan fertile territory for international terrorism. During the rule of the Taliban, Afghanistan was utilized as a safe haven for several organizations which benefited from the regime's tolerance of international terrorism. The collapse of the Taliban's governance of Afghanistan led to the overt disappearance of these groups, but reconstituted elements are still active throughout the country. An environment of a weak central government, corruption, poverty, social exhaustion and illicit power centers allows these groups to operate in Afghanistan, despite U.S. and International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF) efforts to eliminate them. Some or most of these groups have turned their focus inward, seeking to expel western and other foreign elements from Afghanistan, while still promoting terror in other countries. The most prominent of these groups are the Taliban, Al-Qaida and the Haqqani network, which works in conjunction with the Taliban.

Civil Unrest

Visitors to Afghanistan must remain alert for the possibility of civil unrest. While the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) has formalized and implemented a system for legal and orderly protests, spontaneous and potentially dangerous demonstrations do occur.

Recent months have seen incidents where large, sometimes violent crowds have formed in the aftermath of motor vehicle accidents involving coalition force (CF) convoys. Some of these accidents have resulted in deaths, spawning the rapid formation of large, unpredictable crowds. Often, westerners receive the brunt of violence when they arrive at a public venue to assist in an emergency situation.

Travelers should note that disputes between government

representatives and regional leaders may lead to localized protests over land, funding and other such issues. While these arguments do not always descend into violent conflict, such an outcome is possible.

As a general rule, foreigners in Afghanistan should make every effort to avoid large groups of any kind, particularly political or other protests.

III. POST-SPECIFIC CONCERNS

The Drug Trade

The growth of opium and the associated smuggling industry constitute a major threat to the rule of law in Afghanistan. The illegal narcotics trade undermines the integrity of Afghan law enforcement and funds terrorist activity. An informal but complex system, intertwined with local political motivations, governs which group or individuals profit from poppy cultivation in each region. Travelers should be aware that this chaotic environment fuels conflict between drug traffickers, often resulting in large-scale fighting between opposing groups. Additionally, protective and anxious opium growers may guard their territory by employing violent, sometimes murderous, militia members.

Kidnapping

Like many developing countries, Afghanistan struggles with kidnapping-for-ransom schemes. Virtually every foreigner in Afghanistan is wealthy - relative to local standards - and is therefore a potential kidnapping victim. The motivation for these attacks is primarily financial, but visitors should be aware of the potential that apolitical kidnappers might sell their captives to political groups, with whom there is a definite threat of execution for political purposes. 2008 saw the kidnapping of four (4) American citizens in Afghanistan.

Crimes Involving Vehicles

Foreigners in vehicles are at risk for carjacking. While uncommon relative to other forms of violent crime, carjacking remains a possibility.

Theft

Theft is rampant in Afghanistan. Foreigners are vulnerable to standard pick pocketing schemes and armed robberies alike. Home invasions and attacks involving multiple assailants have also occurred. The lawlessness which pervades Afghan society can quickly escalate even the most minor of crimes to a potentially life-threatening situation.

Safety

Road conditions in Afghanistan vary greatly from province to province. Generally speaking, roads are of an inferior quality and travelers should exercise great caution while driving. While some roads in the capital and other large cities accommodate normal sedans, outside of major cities a four-wheel drive vehicle is essential.

Depending on the method used, traversing Afghan rivers can be hazardous. Many bridges are dilapidated and of inferior construction. Even the most pacific creek or river can be deceptively dangerous. Commercial transportation services are as varied as road conditions and should be carefully scrutinized before being used.

Mines

Visitors must remain vigilant to the threat of unexploded ordinance in Afghanistan. While many demining operations are currently underway, several decades of almost continuous warfare makes travel extremely hazardous. Colored flags or rocks are used to indicate whether or not an area has been cleared of mines:

Red - indicates a field has been identified but not yet cleared.

White - indicates a field has been swept, although this is not an assurance that the field has been entirely cleared. White flagged fields are generally 90% cleared.

Avalanches

During colder months, mountain roads and passes can quickly become impassable due to snow. Avalanches are common throughout these areas and travelers need to be aware of the high risk of eroding roads along precipitous thoroughfares. The Salang Pass between Jabal-Sarag and Mazar-e Sharif is one of the most commonly snowed-in passes.

Earthquakes

Afghanistan is in a high-risk earthquake area, with significant quakes and tremors common. The most significant earthquake in Afghanistan was a 7.4 magnitude earthquake on March 3, 2003; earthquakes and aftershocks with magnitudes of 6.0 are not uncommon. The rudimentary construction techniques common throughout Afghanistan also contribute to the possibility of severe injury or death due to earthquakes.

Ongoing Combat Operations

As the GIROA seeks to strengthen its rule, it openly battles anti-government forces throughout the country. This struggle frequently includes the participation of coalition forces. Combat operations can occur at any time in any region of the country, employing air support, artillery fire, and small or large unit operations. GIROA and coalition partners make great efforts to act with precision during these campaigns and to avoid civilian casualties, nonetheless, any combat engagement with insurgent forces poses a significant danger to those in the vicinity.

Local Crime Anomalies

The degree of sophistication displayed by Afghan criminal elements is evolving. While the country still suffers from the most basic criminal acts such as pick-pocketing and home invasion, in recent years a variety of scams and organized schemes have been noted. Burglary of private residences has become increasingly common in Kabul.

Travelers should be aware that while exchanging money or engaging in large financial transactions, there is the potential of surveillance for possible targeting at a later time.

Areas to Avoid

The U.S. Embassy underscores its recommendation that private Americans avoid travel to Afghanistan. Afghanistan is unsafe vis-à-vis American standards, with insurgent, criminal, and terrorist activities occurring throughout the country.

Cultural Sensitivity

Afghanistan is an Islamic country; the majority of the nation's population, its legal system and its customs are Muslim. Americans visiting Afghanistan should be aware and respectful of this.

Travelers should ask their host before taking photographs, particularly of women. Travelers should also be mindful of local attire and dress modestly in public.

IV. POLICE RESPONSE -

Most police are underpaid, as they have been for a long time. "Shakedowns" remain common, as those with money receive a more positive response from local law enforcement. As previously mentioned, corruption is rampant in Afghanistan and law enforcement assistance is often provided to those who have social status. Whenever possible, foreigners are advised to go to their local embassy for police assistance.

V. MEDICAL EMERGENCIES -

Medical services in Afghanistan are extraordinarily challenged,

often lacking basic diagnostic and treatment equipment, as well as the most common medications.

Foreigners are urged to seek emergency medical care on a U.S. military base. In order to facilitate military medical attention foreigners should contact their respective embassy.

The major regional hospitals in Afghanistan are:

ISAF Clinic

Contact: Duty Doctor 079-774-6653

Camp Warehouse Hospital

Contact: 079-514-122 (Rescue Control)
079-826-2544 (Rescue Control)
070-288-598 (Doctor's #)

Bagram Airfield Hospital

Contact: 070-113-2000

Camp Phoenix Hospital

Contact: 070-044-502
070-484-654
079-817-4571
079-321-576

Camp Eggers Clinic

Contact: 070-837-4583

Camp Souter

Contact: 0799-859-895

US Embassy Medical Officers

Contact: Jack Sibal 0797-771-168
Herve Poulard 0797-165-092

VI. HOW TO AVOID BECOMING A VICTIM -

Westerners are strongly urged to avoid travel to Afghanistan. For those who travel to this region, ensure that your housing accommodations are heavily fortified with barriers and armed guards. Register with your respective embassy and, if possible, maintain an extremely low profile. Westerners are advised to travel in armored vehicles with personal body armor and a protective security team. Also, avoid public markets and bazaars as they are often a target for westerners.

VII. EMBASSY CONTACT INFORMATION -

U.S. Embassy

Great Massoud Road Kabul, Afghanistan
Regional Security Officer: 0799-245-456
Embassy Operator: 0700-108-001
Medical Unit: 070-073-655
Consular Affairs: 0700-201-908
Marine Guard Post One: 070-301-490-1042 x8250

VIII. OSAC PRESENCE IN KABUL -

The OSAC community remains highly active in Afghanistan, totaling approximately 65 constituents from various PSCs, non-government organizations (NGO) and other entities and exchanging information on a daily basis. Kabul OSAC has monthly meetings that provide broader security information of a critical nature to the entire OSAC community. If a company is operating within Afghanistan and is headquartered in the U.S., they may become a member by visiting the OSAC website at www.osac.gov.

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